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ABSTRACT

An overlooked framework that allows for clearer understanding of effective teaching is the field of rhetoric. Although the concept has changed over time, Aristotle defines rhetoric as observing the available means of persuasion. These means include ethos, a speaker's credibility; pathos, appeal to emotions; and logos, appeal to reason or arguments. Aristotle's concept of ethos involves persuasion achieved by the speaker's personal character, which makes him believable. There are 3 specific elements that must be demonstrated to employ ethos to the fullest: (1) good will (i.e., caring for students); (2) expertise (i.e., knowing the subject matter); and (3) good character (i.e., demonstrating strong ethics and morals). Persuading through pathos means putting the audience in a certain frame of mind so that the other means of persuasion (ethos and logos) will be most effective. Pathos is the arousing of emotion, such as friendship or kindness, within the targeted audience. Logos, or the appeals to reason, have to do with the arguments, "provided by the words of speech itself." According to Aristotle, the main tools with which to argue logically are enthymeme and example. Each of these Aristotelian concepts, together with "argument from definition" is evident in several specific elements of effective teaching. Finally, the effective teacher must pay attention to her audience, to its needs, its socio-economic background, and its age; in addition, she must think highly of her audience to ensure the highest performance on her part. (Contains 21 references.) (TB)

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Rhetorical Dimensions of Teaching Effectiveness

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Considerable time and effort have been spent in order to better understand effective teaching. The topic has been examined in relation to practically every discipline and at nearly every grade-level. It has been approached through the eyes of scholars, educators, and students. Yet, although we have examined, studied, and described effective teaching, its essence seems still to elude our understanding.

An overlooked framework which allows for clearer understanding of effective teaching is the field of rhetoric. Many of the concepts identified in the literature of effective teaching correspond very closely to classical rhetorical theory. In this sense, teaching is persuasion. In addition, consideration of students as a rhetorical audience provides insight and prescription for successful teaching.

Rhetoric and Effective Teaching

Although the concept has changed over time, Aristotle defines rhetoric as observing the available means of persuasion (Aristotle, 1954, p. 24). These means include ethos, a speaker's credibility; pathos, appeal to emotions; and logos, appeal to reason or arguments. Although rhetorical theory has broadened its scope over time, the persuasive purpose and artistic proofs maintain salience in contemporary theory and, when applied to teaching, add fresh insight.

A review of teaching literature reveals its persuasive purpose. Travers (1981) has stated that the purpose of teaching

is rhetorical--to influence learning. Effective teaching can be identified as "promoting learning through intellectual interaction" (p. 18). Put differently, courses are designed to "change student behavior in a specific direction," namely in the direction of learning the course material (Aleamoni, 1981, p. 111). Teaching is not merely the value-free presentation of information for absorption by students. Rather, it is activity charged with intent to influence acceptance of and engagement with the material. Even students, who describe effective teachers as those who are impression leaving (Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1992), seem to recognize the persuasive dimension of teaching.

Beyond acknowledging its persuasive purpose, researchers have tried to identify specific characteristics and behaviors associated with effective teaching (see Civikley, 1992; Gorham, 1988; Lang, McKee, & Conner, 1993; Murray, 1983; Nussbaum, 1992; Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1992). Many of these behaviors and characteristics bear striking resemblance to the artistic proofs of ethos, pathos, and logos.[1] Use of the classical constructs of artistic proofs serves as an organizational framework for understanding the relationships between rhetoric and effective teaching. However, contemporary theories from Lloyd Bitzer, I. A. Richards, and Chaim Perelman will also enlighten the comparison.

Ethos in Effective Teaching

Aristotle's concept of ethos involves persuasion achieved by

the speaker's personal character, which makes him believable (Aristotle, 1954). There are three specific elements which must be demonstrated to utilize ethos to its fullest: good will, expertise, and good character. One is perceived as having good will when s/he expresses concern and caring for the audience. This also involves identification of speaker with audience through shared values, beliefs, and attitudes. Regarding expertise, it is essential that rhetors appear to know the subject thoroughly. Exhibition of good character involves demonstrating stringent ethics and morals as congruent with the audience. Along with this goes trustworthiness and reliability and the expectation of consistency in that the rhetor's words match her actions (Golden, Berquist, & Coleman, 1978). Max Weber's (1958) concept of charisma further adds to our understanding of speaker ethos. Charisma refers to the perception of extraordinary qualifications. The key to this concept is the belief in the qualifications of the speaker, regardless of the actual presence (or lack of presence) of them.

This concept of ethos is permeates much of the teaching literature. Research in student ratings of effective teaching has identified knowledge of the subject matter as a crucial element (Lang et al., 1993; Weimer, 1990). Students expect that teachers have working knowledge of the material and will be able to assist in exploration of the topic beyond the text. Golden et al. (1976) confirm the importance of this aspect of teaching

ethos in their discussion of perceived expertness. For example, a speaker introduced as a national authority or a prominent scholar in a particular area is perceived more credible by students than one introduced as a substitute teacher. Thus, both prior image of expertise and a demonstration of knowledge are important to teacher ethos.

Good will--having to do with identifying with the audience--and good character--being honest, trustworthy, and sincere--are overlapping dimensions of ethos which are established for the effective teacher through several behaviors. Highly effective teachers tend to share humor, self-disclosure, and personal narratives with their students (Gorham, 1988; Nussbaum, 1992). While such practices may serve to clarify or illustrate material, there is also a dimension of ethos operating. Instructors who engage in these types of behaviors demonstrate what kind of person they are. If the story or joke resonates with the students, a sense of identification or similarity develops between students and the teacher. These activities also reinforce good character by exhibiting that the material is evident or operates not only in the "real world" in a generic sense, but in the teacher's personal "real world." In this sense, the instructor's life or actions correspond to his words. He is not one person in the classroom and quite another elsewhere.

Rhetorical concepts of trustworthiness correspond closely to

a teacher's ability to establish rapport. Murray (1983) has found that rapport-building is another important aspect of effective teaching. Rapport is operationalized by exhibiting concern for students, tolerance for differing viewpoints, approachability, sensitivity to student needs, and willingness to assist with problems (Murray, 1983). Clearly this behavior demonstrates trustworthiness, as the instructor is open and encouraging with regard to problems and differing viewpoints. Showing sensitivity to needs and willingness to help with problems also exhibits good moral character. Many teachers may say they hope everyone will understand the material and do well in the class, but these actions demonstrate this on a behavioral level. The teacher's words are congruent, even emphasized by the actions.

Pathos in Effective Teaching

Persuading through pathos involves putting the audience in a certain frame of mind so that the other means of persuasion (ethos and logos) will be most effective (Aristotle, 1954, p. 24). Pathos is the arousing of emotion, such as friendship or kindness, within the targeted audience. Pathos and delivery work together in the dimension of teaching referred to as enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is often identified by students as highly effective in teaching, but this concept remains abstract and ambiguous, leaving teachers to wonder what it really means and how to demonstrate it (Weimer, 1990). The essence of enthusiasm, I

believe, is captured within the concept of pathos.

Enthusiasm is a frequently identified characteristic of effective teaching (Travers, 1981; Weimer, 1990). It can be communicated through the use of many different behaviors, including facial and vocal expressiveness, smiling and laughter, dramatic gestures and movement, showing energy and excitement, and expressive and open eye contact (Murray, 1983; Nussbaum, 1992; Weimer, 1990).

Although these behaviors serve to get students' attention and make the class more interesting, enthusiasm also operates at a deeper level. As instructors exhibit their enthusiasm about the subject, conveying the emotion through their delivery, the implicit message is that the content itself is interesting and exciting. This emotion is contagious to the students, who, being "told" the class is interesting, also become excited about the material. As the students experience excitement, their desire to believe and "follow" the instructor increases. Thus, aspects of pathos, such as this, relate closely to ethos and the idea of charisma. The students become truly involved in the class not only intellectually but also emotionally.

Logos of Effective Teaching

Logos, or appeals to reason, have to do with the arguments, "provided by the words of the speech itself" (Aristotle, 1954, p. 25). According to Aristotle, there are two main tools with which to argue logically, enthymeme and example. Each of these

Aristotelian concepts, together with "argument from definition," are evident in several specific elements of effective instruction.

The enthymeme, first identified and described by Aristotle (1954, p. 22), has met with some degree of controversy within the field of rhetoric (for overviews of various interpretations of the enthymeme see Bitzer, 1959; Conley, 1984). The controversy, however, centers around definitions and primacy of elements, rather than the characteristic elements of the enthymeme. An enthymeme is a type of syllogism, usually based on probabilities rather than certainties (as successfully argued by Bitzer, 1959). The crucial part of the enthymeme, according to Bitzer (1959), is that the audience provides the premises out of its own opinion or knowledge. In this way, the audience (with the premises it brings) and the rhetor (perceiving and using those premises, though often unstated) both participate in the process of co-constructing the argument. The audience, with the help of the rhetor, actually "helps construct the proofs by which it is persuaded" (Bitzer, 1959, p. 408).

The enthymematic process relates to effective teaching in two particular ways. First, it is related to the concept of clarity, defined as the degree to which the speaker narrows possible interpretations of a message (Civikly, 1992; Murray, 1983). This involves knowing the resources ("premises") the students bring with them into the classroom, and structuring the

presentation in such a way that they will provide the resources necessary to reach the conclusion (i.e. understand and integrate the material). Thus, in looking at an enthymeme as an "incomplete syllogism" (Bitzer, 1959), clarity involves insuring the students can and do fill in the correct pieces of the information.

Second, the enthymeme relates to the idea of promoting participation and interaction in the classroom (Murray, 1983). Aristotle (1954, p. 20) has said the enthymeme is the heart of persuasion. Perhaps one reason for this lies in its co-constructive nature, for it truly engages the audience, drawing them into the situation by participating. Use of this process draws students into the learning situation on the same level. Students, through the co-constructive enthymematic process, can participate in constructing the presentation whereby they will learn, in much the same way audiences participate in their own persuasion.

Whereas the enthymeme works deductively, Aristotle's second tool of logical argument, the example, works inductively. The rhetor provides particular instances, historic or invented, from which to draw general concepts. For instance, a teacher might point out that, after attending a special review session, one former struggling student received an A on the exam, and another who had previously failed the course, improved by two grades. The conclusion is that attending the review session is very

beneficial and can help improve exam grades.

Use of concrete, real-life, and multiple examples is also associated with the effective teaching variable of clarity (Civikly, 1992; Murray, 1983). Murray (1983) shows that use of multiple and concrete examples, which are factors of clarity, increase significantly from low-rated to high-rated teachers as evaluated by students for effectiveness. Although examples certainly function to make the material clearer, helping the students understand the concepts, they also convince the student that the concept holds up in a variety of instances and is, therefore, acceptable (or true).

Another tool of rhetoric, identified by Aristotle (1954, p.146) in his twenty-eight lines of argument, which bears on effective teaching, is that of argument from definition. This type of argument involves a process related to that of Plato's dialectic of establishing what is agreed upon (or "known"), then addressing a new or unexplored concept in terms of what has been agreed upon. Argument from definition relies upon the process of categorizing or perceiving things by type, based on similarity or dissimilarity (Richards, 1936). For example: mammals are vertebrates which have hair, birth living young, and feed the young through female mammary glands; whales are mammals. The argument that whales are mammals lies in the definition of mammal, within which the whale certainly falls.

Argument by definition applies to teaching effectiveness in

two ways. First, much formal education is based upon the concept of argument by definition in that it is a process of thinking about unfamiliar concepts in relation to what we already know--fitting new material into the scheme established by the preceding years of education. Richards (1936) argues that all thinking (which would include learning) is a process of comparing new information to old and creating groups based upon similarities. This approach may stretch slightly beyond the bounds of strict definition (i.e. placing things in groups) into the realm of analogy. Although the process may result in categorization of concepts, it may also lead to integration of ideas based on similarities and differences <u>in relationships</u> to other ideas or things.

Second, the process of definition operates in the classroom on a slightly different level. One element of effective teaching relates to organization of material (Murray, 1983). This dimension is identified by behaviors such as giving a preliminary overview, explaining how new topics fit in, and signaling transition to new topic. These activities help ensure that students and teachers share common understandings before moving on to a new area, as well as identifying what goes with what. This is an excellent illustration of the process of argument by definition.

It is evident by the discussion laid out here that some of these dimensions overlap and work together to form a rhetorical

force. Many of the specific behaviors I have mentioned enhance persuasion in more than one way. For instance, the use of real-life examples drawn from an instructor's personal experience will operate within both logos, by use of the example, and ethos, by using self-disclosure to heighten trust and identification. In addition, many of the dimensions of rhetoric themselves which I have here segregated are actually interrelated, such as pathos (and the concept of enthusiasm) and ethos which intersect through the concept of charisma. In addition, teaching involves persuasion on two levels at once, one regarding the "truth" of the content and one regarding the importance or relevance of the material. The use of pertinent examples, for instance, argue both for the "truth" of a concept and for its relevance in the real world.

The Student as Audience

The attention that has been lavished on the subject of effective teaching is primarily aimed at discovering ways that teaching can be improved. We explore that which makes teaching effective so that others can emulate those characteristics and behaviors in an effort of be effective as well. Yet this process is problematized at least in part by the assumption that instructors teach content rather than students (Weimer, 1990). By approaching effective teaching via the rhetorical paradigm as outlined here, we discover new tools with which to examine and further improve teaching effectiveness and assist in overcoming

this assumption. Approaching students as "audience," using several variations of the rhetorical concept, may help teachers to instruct even more effectively.

An important element of rhetorical strategy is adapting the discourse, as well as the speaker's image, to the audience (Aristotle, 1954). A rhetorical response can only be effective if it meets the constraints and opportunities (knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, etc.) brought by the audience (Bitzer, 1968). Aristotle, for instance, distinguishes audience type according to age and its corresponding characteristics. He identifies the youthful, elderly, and prime audiences. The youthful character is described in detail as embodying strong desires, naivete, tendency to overdo everything, impulsiveness, and immediate gratification. Although defining audience type strictly by age is somewhat problematic (particularly with highly heterogeneous groups), it does enlighten our view of the student as audience. In many situations, teachers deal with a generally homogeneous audience: often of same age and similar socioeconomic and geographic background (although this may be more true for primary and secondary levels than for post secondary levels). By considering age, alone, the instructor can choose appropriate illustrations and examples (particularly those that don't predate the students). Also, by examining the students using this concept of characterizing the audience as a group, an instructor can present material that is appropriate for their level and

apply it in ways that resonate with the students. This approach to "audience" helps the teacher to use the enthymematic process to its fullest, as well as enhance the power of ethos--only by knowing the students can an instructor effectively identify with them and perceive what they might expect of "good character."

The concept of audience may also help us in examining and determining teaching effectiveness in a new way. Black's (1970) concept of the second persona represents the ideal audience for a particular discourse--in other words, those who would be most effectively persuaded by it. By examining the metaphors, content, and other "stylistic tokens" used within a work, we can access the ideology embodied in the discourse, and thereby determine the second persona. We can explore the ideology to identify the beliefs, attitudes, and values (resources which the audience brings to the discourse) which audience members must have in order to buy into the metaphor and other tokens and be effectively persuaded. For example, use of the war metaphor (war on drugs, war on crime, etc.) represents belief in what is "right" over what is "wrong," valued patriotism and rallying against the common and known "enemy," willingness to sacrifice for victory, and pride in helping victims. Use of this metaphor will work well only for people who view war in this way. For instance, this metaphor may work better for people touched by World War II than for those effected by the Vietnam War.

These methods can be used to analyze teaching discourse as

well. By looking at the metaphors and other tokens used and outlining the beliefs, attitudes, and values appealed to, we can "sketch" the ideal student (i.e. the second persona) for that type of teaching. If the ideal student sketch matches the actual student profile, the instruction should be most effective. This process can become prescriptive if instructors begin to consider the beliefs, attitudes, and values of their students, then utilize those elements in their presentations. All discourse attempting to persuade must be adapted to the audience (Perelman, 1990).

Yet the effective instructor wants to encourage her audience to change and grow. Perelman's concept of the "universal audience" adds insight here. In response to Plato's charge that rhetoricians are more concerned about success than truth, Perelman (1990) states that the worth of rhetoric is not measured only by success, but by "the quality of the audience at which it is aimed" (p. 1087). This "universal audience" refers to a rationally, ethically, and generally ideal or perfect audience. Although this audience does not exist in the "real world," it functions in the mind of the rhetor to keep her ethically bound (as the perfect universal audience would see through anything lacking in this). As the speaker responds to the universal audience, she actually addresses the "real" audience, encouraging them to espouse the ideal beliefs, attitudes, values (and knowledge) of the universal audience. Similarly, the classroom

instructor adapts to his audience, as they are, and encourages them to become even more reasonable and ethical.

Effective teaching, then, can be described in rhetorical terms. Highly successful instructors effectively exhibit speaker ethos through subject knowledge and identification with students, while they use pathos by communicating enthusiasm. They effectively utilize tools of logos such as enthymeme, example, and argument from definition. The key, however, to effectively using these classic rhetorical proofs, is the analysis of students as audience. In essence, rhetoric is both helping teachers to improve their instruction techniques and encouraging students to evolve to higher levels of development. In the end, effective teaching is successful persuasion.

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Footnotes

[1]In isolating the variables associated with effective teaching, researchers have used as resources both teachers, through self-reports and peer evaluations, and students (through course evaluations). In this paper I have drawn heavily on the research of student course evaluations because, as E. R. Guthrie (1949) so aptly states, "There is no better criterion of teaching aptitude than teaching performance, and there are no better judges of teaching performance than students and colleagues" (p. 115, emphasis mine). And students spend more time with a teacher's performance than do other teachers. (See also Aleamoni, 1981; Beatty & Zahn, 1990.)